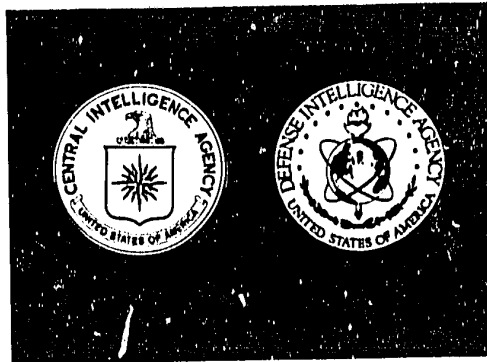


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Supplement To

Survey of Communist Military Developments in Indochina

STATUS OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE COMBAT FORCES

DIA Declassification/Release Instructions on File

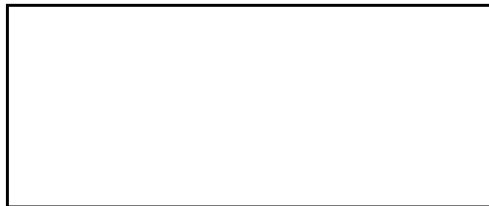
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STATUS OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE COMBAT FORCES

1. The beginning of a new Communist military campaign in South Vietnam occurs at a time when South Vietnam's main force units have suffered some decline in effectiveness. In MR 1, the decline stems from heavy casualties in the late summer and fall fighting. Elsewhere, the problem of adjusting to reduced ammunition and fuel allotments has been the most significant limitation. These reductions were introduced in late summer in response to recent funding cutbacks.

2. The South Vietnamese are hopeful that both of these difficulties can be eased in the future. Although troop replacements to MR 1 units are currently lagging behind loss rates by about two months, sufficient manpower is available to rebuild the units as soon as recruits can be trained.

3. Preliminary indications, including expenditure reports and comments from ARVN field officers, suggest that supply conservation efforts have been generally successful. Progress in adjusting to new supply levels should continue, although the degree to which supply constraints will continue to limit ARVN's effectiveness will depend ultimately upon the level of combat that arises in the future.

4. On a regional basis, ARVN units in MR 1 (see the map) are generally in poor condition following the extended period of heavy combat. All three regular ARVN infantry divisions -- the 1st, 2d, and 3d -- are understrength, and most of the regiments are only marginally combat effective. The recent combat performance of the 3d Division in Quang Nam Province has been encouraging, however, indicating that this formerly weak division is now an effective unit. The Marine and Airborne Divisions remain the strongest combat units in the country, although the airborne force involved in the fighting in Quang Nam Province has suffered moderate attrition and may have lost some of its fine combat edge.

5. A recent realignment of ARVN main forces in MR 2 has left an ARVN division in Binh Dinh Province, another in Pleiku, and a four-group ranger force in Kontum. All are at normal operating strength and have been dealing effectively with the low to moderate activity level prevalent over the past several months.

Note: This publication has been prepared jointly by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.

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U.S. MILITARY FORCES

DECEMBER 1974

Demarcation Line

Autonomous municipality

Province boundary

Scale:

0 25 50 75 Miles

0 25 50 75 Kilometers

Units and Locations:

- Marine Division** (▲)
- Hue** (○)
- 1st Division** (●)
- 15th Ranger Group** (●)
- Airborne Division** (▲)
- Da Nang** (○)
- 12th Ranger Group** (●)
- 3d Division** (▲)
- 14th Ranger Group** (●)
- 11th Ranger Group** (●)
- 2d Division** (▲)
- 4th Ranger Group** (●)
- 6th Ranger Group** (●)
- 22d Ranger Group** (●)
- 23d Ranger Group** (●)
- 23d Division** (▲)
- 25th Ranger Group** (●)
- 21st Ranger Group** (●)
- 24th Ranger Group** (●)
- 32d Ranger Group** (●)
- 31st Ranger Group** (●)
- 25th Division** (▲)
- 5th Division** (▲)
- 18th Division** (▲)
- 7th Ranger Group** (●)
- 33d Ranger Group** (●)
- 9th Division** (▲)
- 21st Division** (▲)
- 7th Division** (▲)
- SAIGON** (★)
- MA Tho** (○)
- Can Tho** (○)
- Vung Tau** (○)
- Nha Trang** (○)
- Cam Ranh** (○)
- Da Lat** (○)
- 22d Division** (▲)
- Quil Nhon** (○)

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6. In MRs 3 and 4, ARVN divisions have been replacing losses suffered during the summer and are now at near full combat effectiveness. One exception is the 21st Division in southern MR 4, which continues to be incapable of halting the gradual erosion of government control in the lower delta. The other infantry divisions and ranger groups, however, can be expected to continue coping with Communist forces now present in MRs 3 and 4, despite some problems caused by the reallocation of ammunition and fuel supplies from the south to more needy units in MR 1. (Following is a detailed listing on the current status of South Vietnamese combat units.)

MR 1

Marine Division (Quang Tri/Thua Thien Provinces)

7. The Marine Division, long considered one of South Vietnam's finest combat units, is the only South Vietnamese division in MR 1 not involved in extensive action during the recent period of heavy fighting there. The division is responsible for the protection of southeastern Quang Tri and northeastern Thua Thien Provinces -- an area it has defended since the beginning of the cease-fire period. The Marines have undergone extensive training since the cease-fire and have performed well in recent months against sporadic Communist attacks. In addition to the three Marine Brigades -- the 147th, 253th, and 369th -- the Marine Division now controls the 2d Airborne and 1st Armored Brigades located northwest of Hue. The division and its subordinate brigades are rated highly effective and the most combat ready ARVN units in MR 1.

Airborne Division (Thua Thien/Quang Nam Provinces)

8. The Airborne Division is one of the few ARVN units to distinguish itself in the recent heavy fighting in MR 1. Since late August the division's primary mission has been to recover ground lost to the Communists in late July and early August in central Quang Nam Province. To date the operation has been successful, largely through the aggressive infantry tactics and proficient use of VNAF strikes and artillery fire that the Airborne Division has become noted for.

9. Two brigade headquarters have alternated in directing the airborne operation, which has involved most elements of all three airborne brigades at one time or another. Currently, five airborne battalions under the direction of the 3d Brigade Headquarters are still battling the NVA 304th Division for high ground about 20 miles southwest of Da Nang. The 1st Brigade Headquarters, with one

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battalion, is in reserve in the Da Nang area, while the 2d Brigade, now with three subordinate battalions, has remained relatively inactive northwest of Hue where it is temporarily assigned to the Marine Division.

10. Although several airborne battalions are understrength and many require rest as a result of the Quang Nam fighting, the division as a whole is still considered combat effective. Because the Airborne Division is not dependent upon the MR 1 pipeline for troop replacements, it is able to replace its losses at a faster rate than other MR 1 units. Some recent losses already have been replaced, and only a month or so of inactivity would be required to restore the division to full combat effectiveness.

1st Division (Thua Thien Province)

11. Although the 1st Division had long been a highly reputable unit, it performed poorly in response to sharp attacks by the NVA 324B Division in late August, yielding several key terrain features south of Hue. In general, the capability of the 1st Division apparently deteriorated from its 1972 level even before the surge in fighting. Largely responsible for the decline is poor leadership, evidenced recently by the division's poorly prepared defenses for the Communist attacks and by poor command tactics, including the commitment of troops piecemeal in sweep operations. The division's capability has been further eroded by recent combat losses, which reportedly have resulted in low morale and acute personnel shortages -- particularly in battalion and company commanders.

12. Two of the division's four regiments -- the 3d and 51st -- suffered heavy losses in the initial attacks and have since been largely withdrawn from combat. Because the rate of troop replacements for MR 1 units has not kept pace with losses in recent months, these two regiments have been unable to rebuild and remain only marginally combat effective.

13. The 54th Regiment was returned to Thua Thien Province in early fall, after performing well in aiding the 3d Division to stop a drive by the NVA 2d Division in southern Quang Nam Province. The regiment reportedly is in better shape than either the 3d or 51st Regiments and is still combat effective -- although it recently has seen more combat than any other ARVN unit in MR 1 and currently is involved in an effort to secure Mo Tau Mountain. The 1st Regiment is now the most combat effective unit in the division. It recently replaced elements of the 3d and 51st Regiments on the front line in southern Thua Thien Province,

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where it has succeeded in averting further Communist gains. In addition to four organic infantry regiments, the 1st Division is also exercising control over the 15th Ranger Group.

3d Division (Quang Nam Province)

14. The 3d Division has performed competently in the heavy fighting in Quang Nam Province that began in mid-July. The long period of continuous combat has severely depleted the division, however, and all three regiments are now only marginally combat effective. Despite their weakened condition, however, the division is now fully committed to defensive positions in southern Quang Nam Province. On the basis of the division's recent performance, it is now considered a better unit than either the ARVN 1st or 2d Divisions.

15. Of the division's three regiments, the 2d is in the best shape. The 57th Regiment, located on the southern flank of the airborne force in central Quang Nam, is the only regiment in the division still heavily involved in combat. The 56th Regiment was hit hardest in earlier fighting and after several particularly heavy attacks in Duc Duc District in early October was left more than 50% understrength. Although not yet fully recovered, the regiment was returned to front line positions in early December after a brief rebuilding and refitting period in the Da Nang area.

2d Division (Quang Tin/Quang Ngai Provinces)

16. The 2d Division is in poor shape following almost continuous combat activity since late spring. In general, its performance has been spotty. Although the 4th Regiment fought well in southern Quang Nam Province for a large part of the summer, and elements of the 6th Regiment scored a significant success in Quang Tin Province in early November, the division has lost substantial territory in Quang Ngai Province over the past several months. Poor performance by the 5th and 6th Regiments was largely responsible for the Communist gains in Quang Ngai, which included the district capital of Minh Long, the Gia Vuc ranger camp, a large area just south of Nghia Hanh district capital, and, most recently, government positions near the coast just north of Quang Ngai City.

17. All three regiments of the 2d Division are now only marginally combat effective -- badly in need of rest, refitting, and replacements. Reportedly about two months of inactivity would be required to rebuild these units -- an opportunity that may arise later in the wet season.

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MR 1 Ranger Forces

11th Ranger Group (Quang Ngai Province)

18. The 11th Ranger Group is assigned to the operational control of the ARVN 2d Division and is currently defending Son Ha and Tra Bong district capitals in northern Quang Ngai Province. One battalion was decimated attempting to defend Gia Vuc in late September. The other two battalions are combat effective but have not made significant progress in reversing recent Communist gains in Quang Ngai.

12th Ranger Group (Quang Nam Province)

19. The 12th Ranger Group is rated the best among ranger units in MR 1. In recent months, it has performed well against heavy Communist attacks in Quang Nam Province, where it operated under the direction of the ARVN 3d Division. The group is battle weary, however, and in early December was replaced on the front line and returned to a reserve status in the Da Nang area.

14th Ranger Group (Quang Ngai Province)

20. The 14th Ranger Group was shifted to northern Quang Ngai Province in early December in response to heavy Communist attacks there. It has since suffered severe casualties and is now nearly combat ineffective. The group performed poorly, particularly one battalion that was involved in the unsuccessful defense of Thuong Duc district capital in Quang Nam Province in early August.

15th Ranger Group (Thua Thien Province)

21. The 15th Ranger Group is now under the control of the ARVN 1st Division and is being used with the 54th Regiment in an operation to secure Mo Tau Mountain south of Hue. The group entered the action well-rested and fully combat effective and thus far has suffered only light casualties.

MR 2

22d Division (Binh Dinh Province)

22. As a result of a recent realignment of ARVN main forces in MR 2, all four regiments of the 22d Division are now in Binh Dinh Province, the division's

traditional area of operation. Three of the regiments -- the 40th, 41st, and 42d -- formerly had been operating with the 23d Division in the western highlands of MR 2. The last to move was the 40th Regiment, which transferred from Kontum to Binh Dinh in late November.

23. The 22d Division has taken fairly heavy losses in recent fighting in Binh Dinh Province but has performed well against the outmatched NVA 3d Division. Most of the losses suffered by the 22d Division thus far have now been replaced, and as a result the division remains near full combat effectiveness. It can be expected to continue performing well against Communist forces in Binh Dinh Province.

24. The 41st Regiment has been the most aggressive of the division's units, recently becoming the first ARVN unit to operate in the southern part of the An Lao Valley since early 1973. The 42d Regiment, transferred from Pleiku to Binh Dinh Province in an operation completed in only six hours, is currently operating in the central part of the province, where it has performed well in fairly continuous action since its August move. The 47th Regiment, in the northern part of the province, is the only unit of the division to be criticized recently for lack of aggressiveness. The 40th Regiment was not involved in extensive combat while in Kontum Province and is therefore available for immediate commitment.

23d Division (Pleiku Province)

25. The 23d Division, formerly tasked with directing government defenses in both Kontum and Pleiku Provinces, relinquished responsibility for Kontum in late November, when the 44th Regiment relocated from Kontum City, joining the 45th and 53d Regiments in Pleiku Province. Although the division is supported in Pleiku by only one ranger group -- the 25th -- ARVN has demonstrated the ability to quickly move additional forces from the 22d Division on the coast or from ranger units in Quang Duc Province to the highlands if the need arises. The 23d Division is at full strength and is rested and combat effective, but would have difficulty defending Pleiku and reinforcing Kontum with the supporting forces now present in the highlands if heavy Communist attacks broke out.

MR 2 Ranger Forces

4th Ranger Group (Kontum Province)

26. The 4th Ranger Group is one of four ranger groups now responsible for the protection of Kontum Province. These rangers -- which also include the

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6th, 22d, and 23d Ranger Groups -- operate under the direct control of the regional ranger command in Kontum City. Prior to its move to Kontum in mid-November, the 4th Ranger Group was involved in fairly heavy combat in Binh Dinh Province but remains combat effective.

6th Ranger Group (Kontum Province)

27. The 6th Ranger Group operated effectively in support of the 22d Division in Binh Dinh Province until late November, when it was shifted to Kontum to become part of the new ranger force there. The 6th Ranger Group begins its new assignment in good condition.

21st Ranger Group (Darlac/Quang Duc Provinces)

28. The 21st Ranger Group has been operating primarily around Kien Duc in Quang Duc Province. The unit is at full strength as a result of recent inactivity and may be used as a reserve force if fighting breaks out elsewhere in MR 2.

22d Ranger Group (Kontum Province)

29. The 22d Ranger Group is located just southwest of Kontum City and operates in conjunction with the new ranger force in providing security for the city. The unit is combat effective and has seen no action in recent months.

23d Ranger Group (Kontum Province)

30. The 23d Ranger Group recently relocated from southwest of Pleiku City to man positions just east of Kontum City. It was involved in sporadic activity this fall in Pleiku Province, but is combat effective.

24th Ranger Group (Quang Duc Province)

31. The 24th Ranger Group performed extremely well early this fall in defending Plei Me in southwestern Pleiku Province from heavy shellings and ground attacks by elements of the NVA 320th Division. The group has since been transferred to Quang Duc Province, where the expected low level of combat will allow the unit to rebuild.

25th Ranger Group (Pleiku Province)

32. The 25th Ranger Group has been operating in southwestern Pleiku Province for a long period and recently expanded its area of operations to include Plei Me and other positions vacated by the 24th Ranger Group. The 25th Ranger Group has been relatively active for several months and would require substantial reinforcements if the Communists renew heavy attacks in this area.

MR 3

5th Division (Binh Duong Province)

33. Most elements of the 5th Division are located in western Binh Duong Province, where their primary responsibilities include the protection of key transportation corridors running southward through the province toward Saigon. Because the 5th Division has not been engaged in sustained combat, it is combat effective and near normal operating strength.

34. All three regiments -- the 7th, 8th, and 9th -- have been operating primarily along Route 7 west of Ben Cat, where ARVN had been seeking to recover lost positions during most of the late summer and early fall. The 9th Regiment was primarily responsible for the recapture of Base 82 in early October, encountering little resistance. Previous attempts by the 8th Regiment to retake the base, however, met strong resistance and were turned back. The division is now involved in the defense of northeastern Binh Duong Province against the NVA 7th Division and also is being considered for future operations against elements of the NVA 9th Division in the Iron Triangle area of western Binh Duong Province.

18th Division (Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces)

35. Although the 18th Division was rated one of ARVN's most capable units earlier this year, continuous operations in both Bien Hoa and Binh Duong Provinces during most of the summer and fall have left the division's units tired and in need of refitting and training. The division is currently involved in the protection of eastern Binh Duong, Long Khanh, Binh Tuy, and northern Bien Hoa Provinces against elements of the NVA 7th Division and the 33d Independent Regiment. All three regiments -- the 43d, 48th, and 52d -- have performed well in recent fighting.

36. The 18th Division has recently been rebuilt to normal operating strength and is now combat effective. Several problems resulting from the sustained combat, however, still limit the division's capability. For example, many of its men are new recruits without adequate training. In addition, the division also suffered particularly high casualties among junior officers, and these losses apparently have not been made up.

25th Division (Tay Ninh/Binh Duong Provinces)

37. Previous assessments of the 25th Division have rated it the least effective of the MR 3 ARVN divisions. In the past, problems with dissension and corruption severely limited its battlefield performance. Recent reporting, however, indicates that the division has made improvements in both leadership and morale, resulting in considerably better performance. The 46th and 49th Regiments are now operating near Tay Ninh City in support of regional forces defending against the outbreak of Communist attacks that began in early December, while the 50th Regiment remains in the Ben Cat area of Binh Duong Province.

38. Future plans call for the 25th Division units to protect against expected incursions by elements of the NVA 5th Division along the infiltration corridors in Hau Nghia Province, and to attempt its own incursion into Communist base areas in northwestern Binh Duong Province. Although the division was not considered combat effective as recently as September, the following two months of light activity and the receipt of some replacements should have enabled it to regain a combat effective status.

MR 3 Ranger Forces

31st Ranger Group (Binh Long Province)

39. The 31st Ranger Group is currently located in southern Binh Long Province, where it has seen little combat activity. Its position lies along a main NVA/VC infiltration corridor, however, and consequently it may be involved in combat in the near future.

32d Ranger Group (Binh Long Province)

40. Located just south of An Loc, the 32d Ranger Group may become involved in extensive fighting if the Communists increase pressure on An Loc. The unit has not been involved in combat recently and is combat effective.

33d Ranger Group (Bien Hoa Province)

41. The 33d Ranger Group recently moved to Bien Hoa Province in reaction to the building Communist threat in eastern MR 3. The group has performed well in the past and is combat effective.

7th Ranger Group (Long Khanh Province)

42. Formerly the JGS reserve force, the 7th Ranger Group was sent to Long Khanh Province this summer to help protect government territory there from attacks by the NVA 33d and 274th Independent Regiments. It has since been operating in Long Khanh, Binh Tuy, and Bien Hoa Provinces, reinforcing ARVN defenses against the NVA 7th Division and the 33d and 274th Independent Regiments.

MR 4

7th Division (Kien Tuong/Dinh Tuong Provinces)

43. The ARVN 7th Division has been the most consistently effective ARVN unit in MR 4. Its primary efforts in 1974 have been in the heavily contested Tri Phap area of western Dinh Tuong Province, where it has inflicted heavy losses on several independent Communist regiments. In addition, the division has been providing support to territorial forces in northern MR 4 during periodic Communist highpoints throughout the wet season. The division's performance has been impaired somewhat by recent cutbacks in ammunition expenditures and helicopter flying time, but supplies are adequate for contending with the present Communist threat within the division's operation area.

44. Since September, the 11th and 12th Regiments have been the most active, while the 10th Regiment apparently has seen only light activity. The division is currently near normal operating strength and can be expected to continue operating effectively against Communist forces in the northern delta despite supply and mobility constraints. Contingency plans call for the move of the 7th Division to MR 3 in an emergency, in which case its current responsibilities in MR 4 would be taken over by elements of the 9th Division and territorial forces.

9th Division (Kien Phong/Kien Tuong/Chau Doc/Kien Giang Provinces)

45. The 9th Division's area of operations is one of the largest in the country, encompassing the provinces of Kien Tuong, Kien Phong, Chau Doc, An Giang, and Sa Dec as well as the northern half of Kien Giang Province. Moreover, two battalions of the 14th Regiment are attached to the 21st Division, leaving the 9th Division with only seven battalions available for operations. The 15th Regiment and the 3d battalion of the 14th Regiment are now spread through Kien Phong and Kien Tuong Provinces, while the 16th Regiment is stationed in northern Kien Giang Province.

46. Overall, the 9th Division is an effective combat force but its ability to deal with major Communist attacks could be significantly impaired in the future by logistic constraints. Although sufficient supplies have been available thus far for limited campaigns, the 9th Division frequently has been forced to provide logistic support from its own stocks to territorial forces within its operational area, adding to the problems caused by limited allocations of ammunition and helicopter flying time imposed by the JGS. Additional pressure on the logistic situation is expected to be exerted by the incursion by the 5th Division into MR 4. Because of its dispersed operating area, in order to react to the threat the 9th Division would require extensive use of helicopters for troop movements and resupply, which it would be unable to accomplish with any speed under the recent cutbacks.

21st Division (Chuong Thien/Kien Giang/An Xuyen/Phong Dinh Provinces)

47. The ARVN 21st Division, considered the least effective in southern South Vietnam, is responsible for security in the lower delta. The division has long been plagued by corruption and discipline problems which have recently been compounded by logistic cutbacks ordered by the JGS. These problems and a broad area of operations, which spreads the division's forces thinly, make the division's task extremely difficult and one the division has not yet measured up to.

48. The 21st Division was recently tasked with securing territory along the Chuong Thien - Phong Dinh - Ba Xuyen Province borders for use as a resettlement area. It has been diverted, however, by an outbreak of Communist attacks in Chuong Thien Province, primarily tying up the 31st Regiment. The division's 32d Regiment has remained inactive throughout most of the summer and fall and is now operating as a security force in An Xuyen Province. The 33d Regiment has been responsible

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for securing lines of communications in Kien Giang and Bac Lieu Provinces, which are pressured periodically by the Communists. The overall combat performance of the 21st Division continues to be disappointing and probably will not improve in the near future.

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